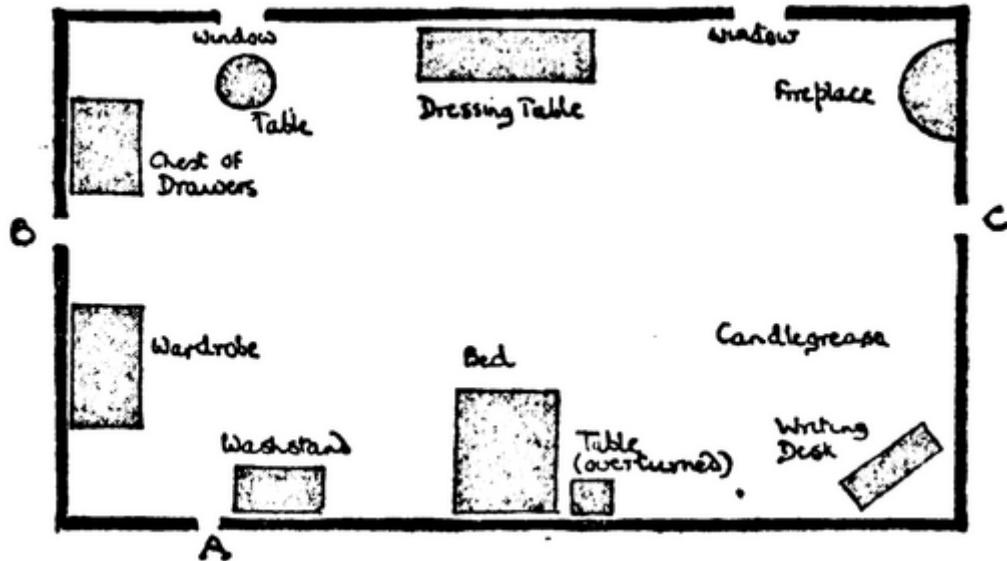


OP-EDS

THE MYSTERIOUS UN-FLAIR OF STYLE

MARCH 31, 2023 | JOEL SCHLOSBERG | 0 COMMENTS



Hercule Poirot can't crack the case of *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* without a clear view of the situation.
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A group of people dwindling at nameless hands for unrevealed reasons is a great setup for suspenseful fiction like Agatha Christie's *And Then There Were None*. It's not so entertaining when it happens in reality.

Christie is back in the news nearly half a century after her passing. Dozens of headlines in media outlets worldwide announce revisions to her classic mysteries which prune vocabulary described as anywhere from "potentially offensive" to outright "racist." (The original title of *And Then There Were None* was undoubtedly the latter, while some of the other altered verbiage didn't actually offend anyone.)

With current editions exhuming past authors from Ian Fleming to Roald Dahl, putting new words in their mouths (while not consulting such collaborators as nonagenarian Dahl illustrator Quentin Blake), it may seem like the only British book that won't be more like George Orwell's *1984* by 2024 is, well, *1984*.

In Christie's *Death on the Nile*, Hercule Poirot noted the need to "clear away the extraneous matter so that we can see the truth." Yet the author's retroactive editors should heed her detective's warning in

the same novel against lapsing into shortcuts “to escape the strain of having to think.”

As Eric Frank Russell put it: “Nothing can defeat an idea — except a better one.” Like Christie, Russell used the title “And Then There Were None” to convey a relentless erosion of governmental enforcement of order. Russell’s tale was set on a distant planet where an invading spaceship crew steadily declines, not from deadly weaponry but via peaceful resistance crumbling their resolve. No furtive mastermind is the culprit; that world’s egalitarian society has no clearly designated ruler, and turns out to not require political leadership at all.

Escaping the Thought Police doesn’t require travel to the isolated island of Christie’s *And Then There Were None*, let alone following Russell out of the solar system. It doesn’t even require mandates to preserve textual integrity. It’s enough to make a stand on the right to use our brains to solve the perplexing problems of our times as freely as Christie’s sleuths employed theirs.

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2. “[The mysterious un-flair of style](#)” by Joel Schlosberg, Mat-Su Valley Frontiersman [Wasilla, Alaska], April 6, 2023